2009

The Effect of Emotional State on Inadvertent Plagiarism Memory Errors

Amanda C. Gingerich
Butler University, mgingeri@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers

Part of the Educational Psychology Commons, and the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
The Effect of Emotional State on Inadvertent Plagiarism Memory Errors
Amanda C. G. Hege
Butler University

Abstract
We investigated inadvertent plagiarism by inducing participants into a happy or sad mood before they generated items in a puzzle task. Compared to happy mood, participants induced into a sad mood made fewer memory errors in which they claimed a previously-generated idea to be new; confidence ratings in these errors, however, was higher.

Method
Participants:
40 University of Virginia undergraduate students (20 Happy Mood and 20 Sad Mood)

Procedure:
Participants took turns with a computer player generating solutions to six Boggle-type puzzles in the Initial Generation (IG) phase. Then, in the Generate-New task, participants were instructed to generate new solutions to each puzzle that were presented neither by themselves nor by the computer player during Initial Generation. Participants were induced into a happy or sad mood by writing about a happy or sad personal event for 10 minutes before Initial Generation.

Results
As predicted by the affect-as-information hypothesis, compared to those in a happy mood, those in a sad mood showed a lower proportion of partner-plagiarism and self-plagiarism errors.

Background
Mood and Memory
Negative mood has been shown to increase the accuracy of memory. The affect-as-information hypothesis maintains that individuals' moods provide them with information about how to interpret a given situation. Participants induced into a happy mood are more likely to rely on general knowledge structures that have been activated and to process information more globally whereas individuals in sad moods are more likely to focus on information specific to the situation at-hand. The item-specific focus of individuals in sad moods is thought to result in more accurate memory than that of individuals in happy moods.

Inadvertent Plagiarism
Inadvertent plagiarism represents a memory error that occurs when one claims as new an idea generated previously. In this way, it is a failure to accurately discriminate old items from new items.1 3

References

Prediction
The affect-as-information hypothesis predicts that sad mood results in more local, item-specific processing than does happy mood, which should lead to fewer inadvertent plagiarism errors for participants induced into sad mood. Therefore, partner-plagiarism errors in the Generate-New task were expected to be lower for participants in the sad mood group than for those in the happy mood group.

Conclusions
Participants induced into a happy mood mistakenly claimed items to be new when, in fact, they were originally generated by the computer partner (partner-plagiarism errors) or by themselves (self-plagiarism errors) more so than did those induced into a sad mood. This suggests that item-specific processing accompanies a sad mood, resulting in fewer memory errors and an inflated sense of memory accuracy.